NEWS AND GOSSIP OF THEATRES

PERCY HUTCHISON AND MURIEL MARTIN-HARVEY IN "THE LUCK OF THE NAVY"

IN connection with the appearance of Percy Hutchison at the Manhattan Opera House in "The Luck of the Navy," under the management of F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest, it is interesting to point out a few of the important facts in the career of this player who comes to the United States on his first visit as an absolute stranger yet who in his own country occupies a position second to none in the world of actor-managers.

Mr. Hutchison is intimately related both in England and in America with personalities which link hands across the seas, for he is a nephew of the late Sir Charles Wyndham of England and he is also a nephew of the late Bronson Howard, whose name will always stand for the best there is in the history of the American drama. His father, Percy Hutchison, Sr., and Bronson Howard married sisters — the former married Emma Culverwell of England, while the famous dramatist, Bronson Howard, married Alice Culverwell. Furthermore, as both ladies were sisters of the late Sir Charles Wyndham (whose family name was Culverwell before he adopted the stage name of Wyndham) this forms the connecting link in a series of relationships which certainly binds Mr. Hutchison to both countries, as it makes him not only the nephew of the late Bronson Howard, the master dramatist of America, but also the nephew of the late Sir Charles Wyndham, who at the time of his death less than a year ago was regarded as England's foremost actor-manager.

Mr. Hutchison, who personally managed the productions and the theatres of his distinguished uncle, has been an actor-manager on his own account in London for more than a dozen years, producing in that time seventy-nine plays, among them a number of American successes. He has also made a tour to Australia and South Africa, and he proposes, after a tour of the United States, to visit Canada. In London Mr. Hutchison is the present lessee and manager of the Princess Theatre and of Wyndham's Theatre, and he is also lessee and manager of a number of theatres in the British provinces.

Mr. Hutchison produced "The Luck of the Navy" nearly two years ago at the Queen's Theatre, London, and played it there continually until sailing for America under contract with F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest for an American tour. During the war Mr. Hutchison served with Sir Alfred Butt as a committee of two, representing the London managers, to give performances and entertainment to visiting American soldiers and sailors, and many an American Jackie or Buddie has seen "The Luck of the Navy" on a pass through the courtesy of Mr. Hutchison. He also presented "The Luck of the Navy" at a special command performance before the Queen of England and the British royal family last October for the benefit of the British Royal Navy Prisoners of War Fund, realizing more than $20,000 at one special matinee when the Queen attended. One of Mr. Hutchison's most prized possessions is a letter of the Queen of England thanking him for the performance and expressing her pleasure at seeing "The Luck of the Navy." This letter from Buckingham Palace, framed, is now on exhibition in the lobby of the Manhattan Opera House.

Mr. Hutchison has had the honor to play before royalty on many important occasions. During the State performance given by his uncle, Sir Charles Wyndham, at Windsor, he appeared with him before the late King Edward VII., Queen Alexandra and the present King and Queen of Italy. Mr. Hutchison also appeared in Sir James Barrie's "Kiss for Cinderella" before Queen Mary and the royal family, and on two occasions also in "The Luck of the Navy," which latter play was specially produced at one of the largest theatres in London, the Palace Theatre, W.

Mr. Hutchison is closely associated with the royal navy. During the war he served in the Twentieth Division of Armored Motor Cars, R. N. V. R., as a sublieutenant. Strange to say, one of his first duties was to conduct fifteen American editors through the secret camp for tanks and explain to them the intricacies of this successful war machine. Mr. Hutchison as a sublieutenant was the first naval officer during the war to successfully float a tank.

Mr. Hutchison has had sixteen London theatres under his control, in addition to which he has large English provincial interests, theatres and companies. Over 200 touring companies have been conducted by him, and he has produced more plays than any other English manager, "The Luck of the Navy" being the ninetieth to his credit. He has a play by Harold Terry and Rafael Sabatini, the authors of "General Post" and "The Man Who Stayed at Home," dealing with the American War of Independence entitled "The Rattlesnake." Mr. Hutchison also has a new and original farce by R. C. Carton, the well known author of "Nurse Benson" and "The Off Chance," for American production.

It is interesting to note that "The Luck of the Navy" is correct in detail in every particular, even the uniforms having been passed and authorized by the British Admiralty. This is the only British naval play presented to an audience in which the correct naval uniforms were permitted to be used, and the play has been witnessed and approved by many Admirals, Commanders, Captains and members of the British navy.

WILDA BENNETT IN "APPLE BLOSSOMS"

HIPPODROME RAYS.

For Columbus Day R. H. Burnside has prepared special spectacular features at the Hippodrome in the book shop scene of Charles Dillingham's production, "Happy Days," with Belle Story as *America*, Joseph Parson as *Columbus* and Mark Luescher as the *Power of the Press*. The rest of the performers, including Poodles Hanneford, who is gradually gaining a mastery over horsemanship; Lalla Selbini, who can ride a well broken bicycle, and Helen Carr, who dives 120 feet in order to get a bath, are doing nicely, thank you.

EVA AND THE APPLE.

LIKE the original Eve, and also like Eve's theatrical descendant, *Eva King*, whom she impersonates in "Adam and Eva" at the Longacre Theatre, Ruth Shepley likes apples—eating them is part of her life work, apparently. She likes them so much that she even had the authors of this delightful comedy, George Middleton and Guy Bolton, insert an apple into the cast of the play.

There is a scene toward the end of the last act in which *Eva* offers *Adam* a bite of her apple, and of course the man falls for it. That always insures a good laugh from the Scriptural students in the audience. Miss Shepley assumes the full responsibility for that bit, and since it virtually makes her one of the collaborators of the comedy, she feels that if she cared to claim her rights she would be entitled to a royalty of three apples per performance.

"No, I didn't have the scene put in to give scope for my craving for apples," said Miss Shepley in her dressing room, with a smile that was lost around a large apple. "I felt that a play like 'Adam and Eva' ought to have an apple in it to be correct, and I kept after them until they put one in to satisfy me. Afterward I always finish the apple—religiously. I eat ten a day at my place at Great Neck—perhaps that's what fits me for this part."

Such honest fruit naturally arouses expectations of a healthy, normal personality, and Miss Shepley easily lives up to such specifications. She suggests a normal outdoors American girl, and one of the "props" which make that suggestion convincing is her Long Island bungalow. She has taken it for the summer with Adelaide Prince, who plays the part of her aunt, *Abby Rocker*, in the same comedy, and stays there as a means of keeping the grease paint off her real character.

"I like the theatre very much," she said, "but not as a home to live in. At bottom it's artificial, and I'm willing to keep away from it a good part of the time, even if I have to lead the simple life. Down at Great Neck to-day Adelaide and I walked seven miles, and at the end I said to her, 'Adelaide, some people would feel bored stiff spending a quiet day like this, but we're not downhearted, are we?' And she made it unanimous.

"Golfing and horseback and a nice supper at home enable me to come to the theatre at night with real interest so that I can eat my apple in the last act with relish."

Miss Shepley went on the stage from the quite natural desire to earn her own living. She is the first of her family to look after the advancement of the theatre personally, even though her people come from Providence, R. I., the town which was the first thing that George M. Cohanized. Miss Shepley hesitated for a moment before she said, with a quizzical smile, that she was born there; but when it was pointed out that Mr. Cohan had conferred the same distinction upon the place she readily admitted that she has even gone back and visited it.

By the time she was six her family had outgrown Providence, and they came to New York, later placing their daughter for safe keeping in the Convent of St. Elizabeth at Morristown, N. J. It was there that the Shepley influence on the drama first came to be felt for she played in "Romeo and Juliet" and other school theatricals and was acknowledged to be the star of the Morristown circuit.

"Since I went on the professional stage," she said, "girl friends have come to see me and have exclaimed, 'Oh, I do wish you would do *Juliet* again — I remember how wonderful you were at school. You'd surely make a hit.' But though *Juliet* is the only part in Shakespeare, with the exception of *Rosalind*, that I'd care to play, I'm scared to try it. I'm afraid they might say I wasn't as good as when I played it, looking up at a kerosene moon and standing on a step ladder for a balcony."

After graduating from the convent Miss Shepley went to Paris and studied French and the piano for three years, the latter training having its beneficial results, for she plays the instrument in the comedy so well that, unlike most actresses, one realizes it is a person and not a pianola performing.

Her first engagement on the stage began in August, 1908, as *Diana* with Douglas Fairbanks in "All for the Girls," which had a good run to Cain's storage house. A month later she was again following Fairbanks's pace, in company with Thomas Wise, as *Carolina Langdon* in "The Gentleman from Mississippi," being able to keep up with him for three years. Then came "Nearly Married," with two seasons in the Springfield Stock Company to learn the trade secrets. Next she did the part of *Marie Grayson* in "It Pays to Advertise," which paid for a year in New York. Finally, just prior to her present role, she played *Grace Tyler* in "The Boomerang," which required sixty-four weeks to wear out its welcome with the American people.

So altogether, in the matter of long runs, Miss Sheapley has been singularly fortunate in her eleven years on the stage, and candidly concedes a lot of the credit to luck. She appeared only once in the movies, playing five years ago with Robert Warwick in "Alias Jimmy Valentine," and feels she was so "terrible" she doesn't want to try them again until she is sure she can be something much better than a dreadful example.

ALBERTA BURTON IN "FIVE O'CLOCK"

JOHN CUMBERLAND'S MISSION.

"MY mission in life," says John Cumberland in "The Girl in the Limousine," the popular farce at the Eltinge Theatre, "is to lie under a bed. It doesn't sound very noble, but it must have a purpose or fate would have relented. To be more precise, my mission in full consists in getting in and out of beds, under them, in and out of baskets and sundry places of concealment, and in displaying the fine lines of my Greek figure in the latest thing in union suits.

"This may not be art, as Mr. Kipling says, but it must be something. It's good business at any rate. Maybe it has something to do with the League of Nations.

"When I was cast for this role in 'The Girl in the Limousine' I said to Mr. Woods: 'This is positively my bedroom farewell. I may not be a *Romeo*, but I played with Mansfield, and I am aching to do the heavy, the emotional stuff, the fancy work that so deeply affects the critics.' Mr. Woods rose to the occasion and responded nobly like this: 'That's all right, John. I've got a wonderful play for you for next year.' 'What's the name of it?' I asked, standing on tiptoe. '"Arabian Nighties,"' answered Mr. Woods. When I came out of my faint I was lying in bed, where I spend most of my life and my talent.

"One nice thing about the profession of bed running, as I call it, is the simplicity of the wardrobe. My clothes in 'The Girl in the Limousine' consists of a union suit, a dressing gown and a pair of slippers. This is all I wear from the time I arrive at the theatre until I leave. As winter draws nigh and the coal strike threatens, my enthusiasm for art is beginning to wane. I am having made, in preparation for any emergency, a union suit of fur that will probably be pictured and described at length in all the fashion magazines.

"My playing of bedroom roles is beginning to affect my private life. I am getting furtive and suspicious. I am always on the lookout for imaginary irate husbands. When I see an open window I have a tendency to jump. A box of any kind tempts me. It is because I have spent so much of my life with the lid down.

"But people like it and I am glad to make them happy. 'The Girl in the Limousine' is proving so popular that a season in bed is certainly in store for me—if I can only live through the winter."

JEANNE EAGELS IN "A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY"

OF THE KAUSERS.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN KAUSER, on playbills as Benj. Kauser, was born some thirty years ago in Paris, France, of American parents. Mother—was Bertha Gerster, well known on the Continental operatic stage. Her sister, Etelka Gerster, sang here in the '80s. His mother was Verdi's choice for the title role in "Aida" to replace Mme. Stola; was also selected by Franz Liszt to sing the title role in his "Joan of Arc" and chosen by Richard Wagner to sing *Elsa* in "Lohengrin" when it was preparatory produced by him. Father—was Joseph Steven Kauser, architect and engineer; built the Corinth Canal in Greece and associated with De Lesseps in many of his projects. He won all the prizes possible for a foreigner to win at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, being the favorite pupil of Abel Blouet, the builder of the Arche de Triomphe. Among the awards won by him as a result of his winning the Beaux Arts prizes were the reconstruction of the palace at Fontainebleau under Napoleon III., and the designing of the Tour de L'Horloge of the Palais de Justice in Paris. Father was born in Hungary, fought in the revolution against Austria, was captured twice by the Austrians and sentenced to be hanged on each occasion, but escaped, the last time going to France. From there he came to America and became such an ardent lover of democracy that he became an American citizen in 1850, being immediately appointed Vice-Consul to Austria-Hungary, where he served for some years. During the war for the confederation of Italian States he won the admiration of Garibaldi and was appointed by him to his staff. He was so devout an American citizen that he named his elder son George Washington Kauser, his second son Benjamin Franklin and affirmed that if he had had a third he would have named him Abraham Lincoln Kauser.

The Kauser family come from Mulhausen, Alsace. Immediately after the Mongolian invasion of Europe, over 600 years ago, the famous King Bela of Hungary searched Europe for the best architects of the Continent in order to have them repair the ravages of the barbaric invasion, and principal among these architects was one Paul Kauser, a native of Mulhausen, who received some of the most important commissions from King Bela, and for the last 600 years the Kauser family have been chiefly architects, sculptors, stonecutters and artists.

Benjamin Franklin Kauser was admitted to the bar at the age of 21, practised for four years, and gave up law for the stage, a step which he has never regretted. He has been associated with the following managements and stars:

Mrs. Fiske—*Geoffrey Rawson* in "Mrs. Bumpstead Leigh."

John and Lionel Barrymore—*Archille* in "Peter Ibbetson."

William Faversham—All star production of "Julius Cæsar."

Margaret Anglin—Carnegie Hall productions Greek plays, 1918: *Pylades*, Sophocles's "Electra"; *King Ægeus* in "Medea" of Euripides.

Julia Arthur—The dumb boy in "Seremonda."

Holbrook Blinn—Princess Players, Princess Theatre.

George C. Tyler, in association with Klaw & Erlanger—Chicago production of "Moloch."

Charles Hopkins—"Treasure Island."

Joseph Brooks—"Mr. Myd's Mystery."

His success as *Dick Babb*, the rugged mountaineer, in "Thunder," is one of the character gems of the performance.

HELEN WESTLEY IN "THE FAITHFUL"

A COLLEGE SONG.

"SANS SOUCI," the song that has so much to do with creating an atmosphere in "First Is Last," the comedy at Maxine Elliott's Theatre, has been a favorite with students in Columbia College for a good many years. Perhaps its greatest popularity began, however, two decades ago with the class of '99, of which John Purroy Mitchel was a member. That class has been unusually faithful in its reunions and "Sans Souci" always works its magic through the memories of the old boys.

The song is rendered behind the scenes in "First Is Last" by the Brighton Quartet. The singers evidently realize that this is no vaudeville stunt to be "pulled" with a flourish. Since they are invisible to the audience, whatever effects might otherwise be produced through personality are sacrificed. The music is what counts and it must be good.

"We had to try four different arrangements of this song before we got it right," explained one of the singers. "Then you've no idea how hard it is to sing just loud enough for the audience to hear, and yet so softly that the music will blend with the action without interrupting it."

It is almost time for the first act to begin. The quartet goes off to the wings with certain stage hands and a man in a butler's costume to do the "cheering" that is heard through a window by the audience in the first scene. The curtain goes up and the leather lunged stage hands try to drown out the trained voices of the quartet. The butler conducts the cheering in the manner of Bodanzky at the Metropolitan Opera House.

The quartet files solemnly back to its place by a blank wall to be ready to furnish the audible atmosphere when the time arrives. The man in a butler's costume waves his hand and the singing begins. It makes no difference that the audience is shut away. The tenor lifts his eyes to heaven with the same "O Moon of My Delight" expression that John McCormack uses on 2,000 rapt admirers. The bass drives his notes down to the depths as though he were laying foundations for a skyscraper. The second tenor and the baritone fill in the middle distance.

The man in the butler's costume is James Kearney, stage manager, who also plays the role of *Selby*. Could anybody imagine a more harmonious combination than that of a butler and a stage manager? Both are autocrats in their worlds, and when one man plays both parts he acquires an authority such as even the late Czar of Russia never possessed.

But Mr. Kearney is a very gentle ruler. He tiptoes around, waving his hands in various directions. He looks at his watch and everything moves as though the scenery were somehow connected with the stage manager's timepiece. Maybe he has to wind it all up every night when he does his watch.

"Which do you like better, acting or managing?" asked a visitor unterrified by this double grandeur.

"Acting," was the emphatic answer. "At least," he added, "I like to do a bit of a part. I got the hang of stage work years ago and now when I apply for a part they often ask, 'Will you take the stage too?' So that's how it works out. My part in this play has been cut down a great deal."

He said this last regretfully, and one couldn't help wishing that he might have a change to play Barrie's "Admirable Crichton," where the butler is hero.

The effect of a comedy from behind the scenes is a curious reversal. The audience seems to be playing the real drama. There is a new cast every night, but no rehearsal is needed. All the actors have to do is laugh or give those indefinable expressions of interest that are felt rather than seen or heard. One gets this latter effect with such a passage as that in which the young composer who was to have written the great American symphonies enters in the last act drunk. He has descended from his dreams to play the piano in the back room of a saloon. But he has never lost the love of his art. And as he pulls himself by sheer force of will power out of the tipsy state in which he entered the audience responds to the intensity of his appeal for beauty and truth. Even back stage one is aware of the quality of the silence with which this great speech is attended.

But "First is Last" is after all a comedy and the chief impression which filters through the scenery is that of a crowd thoroughly enjoying itself. The big explosions of laughter are followed and preceded by little chuckles like the small waves that spread from the great wash of a steamer.

INA CLAIRE IN "THE GOLD DIGGERS"

A NEWCOMER.

Lemist Esler, well known socially in New York, has turned actor, and what is more to the point is proving himself a light comedian of consequence. He had never been on the stage until John Cromwell, general stage director for William A. Brady, summoned him to the Playhouse one night recently, handed him the part of *Jack Grover* in the Owen Davis melodrama, "At 9:45," and told him it was up to him to go on and play it. Esler, always interested in the theatre, needed but little urging. He quickly memorized the lines and business, and from his first performance has given excellent account of himself, a fact to which those who see "At 9:45" nightly testify.

Esler's career has been nothing if not varied. He has packed a deal of experience into comparatively few years. He was born in New York, lived for many years in Paris and has been successively Harvard student, explorer, writer, editor, Wall Street broker, soldier, and now actor. Leaving Harvard in 1910 he went abroad, and shortly, at the head of his own caravan, set out to explore the Sahara. He was gone six months and succeeded in reaching the little known Valley of the Sahara. Later he made another exploring trip up through the wilds of the Hudson Bay country, where he spent a year exploring and writing short stories. Returning to New York he turned his attention to publishing, being one of the promoters and original editors of the *Chronicle*, that much discussed society magazine which retailed at $1 a copy. Severing his connection with the *Chronicle*, he became head of the Wall Street firm of Esler & Co., and might have been there yet had not the war turned the world upside down.

Three days after this country declared war Esler enlisted in the old Seventh Regiment, later being transferred to the Sixty-ninth, with which he served in France. He saw eight months' service in front line trenches, and was with Joyce Kilmer, for whom he entertained the highest admiration, when that young writer was killed. He saw service in various sectors, went through Chateau Thierry and then was returned to Camp Lewis, Washington, as a signal instructor.

Mustered out, he returned to New York and was putting some of his experiences in book and short story form when came the call from the Playhouse, with the result that he now finds himself an actor, safely landed on that Thespian Mecca—Broadway.

A WALTER THEORY.

In "The Challenge," Eugene Walter's new play now at the Selwyn Theatre, Mr. Walter again makes a contribution to contemporary thought in the form of melodrama, explaining his adherence to this mode of expression by saying that melodrama is the most familiar language to America.

"Melodrama is the one form of playwriting that is true to American life, for we are all melodramatic to the core, whether we admit it or not. And if melodrama is our most familiar language then why not talk in terms of melodrama?" the playwright demanded to know when recently discussing a tendency to sniff at the play which deals frankly and directly with primitive emotions.

"That which tells the truth about life is the only real art there is." Mr. Walter went on with his personal definition of the melodrama. "The main difference between melodrama and other forms of drama is that the former deals only with vital situations and experiences. So, unless we are ashamed of the big moments in our lives, there is no reason to hide the satisfaction we find in the big and virile melodrama that strips away the hypocrisy and veneer and shows us the heart of man.

"It is the big moments of life which thrill us, both on and off the stage; the big moments which are worth while, so that it always makes me distrustful to hear a man decry the great, big throbbing story of primitive emotions when it is told upon the stage. Nothing so quickly convinces me that he is a hypocrite, for at heart the whole world loves melodrama. High or low, rich or poor, we all enjoy the depiction of familiar emotions. It is the one vehicle for strong emotions and big situations and therefore it appeals to America more than to other nations, for, as a nation, we are yet a primitive people doing big things in a big way. We haven't yet the veneer of European countries which have centuries of culture behind them, but we lose nothing on that account, for too frequently in 'getting a polish' a people rubs off something of a more desirable sincerity. Here in America we are frank, direct and without pretensions. That is why the man who tells the truth will admit that he likes the play which deals with big emotions," Mr. Walter concluded.

"The Easiest Way," "Paid in Full" and "Fine Feathers" are the most striking predecessors of "The Challenge," in which Mr. Walter has kept faith with his belief in the potency of this form of playwriting.

SOME OF THE CHORUS IN "ROLY-BOLY EYES"

"When there's a will there's a way" has been proved true by "the largest theatre in the world"—the Capitol at Broadway and Fifty-first street, New York—when that huge institution was converted into a moving picture studio the other day in an endeavor to show that art and mechanics can easily meet without a clash. Hammers pounded and saws buzzed amid the tinkling of lively tunes as Ned Wayburn, the "drill major" of many beauty choruses, urged his revue on and on to the best of dance and song. Occasionally the ranks of diligently rehearsing girls were suddenly broken by a "nervy" hod carrier in a ceaseless effort to deliver the substances that are bringing the structure to completion. This was only one of the disturbances that broke up, now and then, the lively paces of the little beauties.

Nothing could distract the little beauties; like a regiment of soldiers they stuck nobly to their leader, trooping merrily across the stage, undaunted by falling plaster, discarded lumber or showers of nails. The show must be perfect and the Capitol Theatre must be opened—and good "movies" must necessarily be supplemented with a perfect revue. And so the strange combination proceeds on the Capitol stage. This procedure has not only proved that art and mechanics can meet, but it has given the Wayburn beauty brigade an opportunity to break into the inevitable "movies," for a motion picture was made of the strange scene.

The management promises to flash this "test" upon the screen during the opening week so that Capitol audiences can be better introduced to the personnel of the Wayburn Revue.

PLAYS THAT LAST.

Astor, "East Is West"; Bijou, "An Exchange of Wives"; Booth, "Too Many Husbands"; Broadhurst, "The Crimson Alibi"; Central, "Oh What a Girl"; Cohan & Harris, "The Royal Vagabond"; Comedy, "The Five Million"; Cort, "John Ferguson"; Criterion, "Thunder"; Eltinge, "The Girl in the Limousine"; Empire, "Declassee"; Forty-eighth Street, "The Storm"; Forty-fourth Street, "Hello, Alexander"; Gayety, "Lightnin'"; George M. Cohan, "See-Saw"; Globe, "Apple Blossoms"; Harris, "The Dancer"; Henry Miller's, "Moonlight and Honeysuckle"; Hudson, "Clarence"; Knickerbocker, "Roly-Boly Eyes"; Liberty, "Hitchy Koo"; Longacre, "Adam and Eva"; Lyceum, "The Gold Diggers"; Maxine Elliott's, "First Is Last"; Morosco, "Civilian Clothes"; New Amsterdam, "Ziegfeld Follies"; New Amsterdam Roof, "Nine o'Clock Revue" and "Midnight Frolic"; Nora Bayes, "Greenwich Village Follies"; Plymouth, "The Jest"; Princess, "Nightie Night"; Punch and Judy, "Where's Your Wife?"; Republic, "A Voice in the Dark"; Selwyn, "The Challenge"; Shubert, Sothern and Marlowe; Thirty-ninth Street, "Scandal"; Vanderbilt, "At 9:45"; Winter Garden, "Shubert Gaieties."